

VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

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Dear Friends,

The core of nonviolence, as preached by Mohandas Gandhi and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, involves believing in and appealing to an opponent's capacity for goodness.

How can we apply this belief to the currently escalating U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan where, we are told, groups of Taliban fighters pose a threat to U.S. security and abuse people in the villages and towns that they control? Who are these people we're now being taught to fear and hate? These questions have been on our minds since we first began planning aVoices delegation to Pakistan.

In light of the extreme poverty that afflicts a majority of people in Pakistan, we wonder if many of the recruits who've joined Taliban groups are young men who are more or less dispossessed, who don't have much of a future on the family farm or in an urban setting. Shut out of education, with few prospects of getting an economic stake in the community, these young men could easily resent people at the higher levels of the social system who seem to live an easy life. Such young men might be very drawn to preachers extolling an Islamic society that would set up a social welfare system, redistribute the land, and enact legal procedures aligned with teachings in the Koran. The chance to carry and operate weapons might be an added incentive to join a Taliban group.

During the Viet Nam War, in his 1967 Beyond Vietnam speech, Dr. Martin Luther King urged U.S. people to: "see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic

weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition."

Today's policy makers seem more inclined to heed a perspective that Madeleine Albright articulated in February, 1998. "We're the indispensable nation," she stated on *The Today Show*. "We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us."

Now, using "eyes in the skies" by piloting unmanned aerial vehicles, (drones), the U.S. can see and attack suspected Taliban fighters, along with anyone else who might be in the vicinity, in Afghanistan and Pakistan. But, all of our "eyes in the skies," performing constant surveillance, will never help us see our opponents as potential neighbors. We'll never really see them at all, as humans who must never be mistaken for objects, until we cast away our weapons.

This newsletter offers reflections about international travels to Pakistan, northern Iraq, Syria and Jordan.

We also present a broad outline for the Peaceable Assembly Campaign, which we hope will help us link with people across the U.S. who want to build a strong, active and radical peace movement.

Sincerely,
Kathy Kelly, Dan Pearson, Gerald Paoli, Joshua Brollier, Jeff Leys



FOLLOW THIS SIGN

by Dan Pearson and Kathy Kelly

At the entrance to a vast tent encampment outside the town of Shah Mansoor, in Pakistan's Swabi district, a billboard shows a ban sign superimposed on a rifle. The message is clear: No Weapons Allowed. But, the suffering multitude of displaced people living inside the camp now face a threat that does not come from a weapon. They are one step away from destitution.

When families living in the camp fled intense fighting in the Swat Valley, they left behind whatever security and belongings they possessed. "What do we have now?" a shopkeeper from the town of Mingora asked us. "Our crops are destroyed. Our animals have starved. How could we begin our shops again?" He gestured to an elderly man who had joined us and explained that the man's five-room house was leveled by shelling. The elderly man, whose three sons and five daughters were nowhere to be found, was now completely dependent on strangers he and his wife had met in the camp. The man stood, silently trembling, as we listened to the shopkeeper tell about the horrors he, his family and his neighbors endured before they arrived in Shah Mansoor.

Subjected to a 24-hour curfew, they couldn't leave their homes during the first weeks of a Pakistani military offensive. The shopkeeper said that Pakistan's armed forces indiscriminately shelled their town in an effort to dislodge suspected supporters of the Taliban. On May 27th, the curfew was lifted for several hours. Families scrambled to grab belongings and escape, on foot.

Amid the commotion and chaos, harried residents also tried to bury some of the corpses they saw along the road leading out of town. "There were not hundreds but thousands of dead bodies on the streets," said the shopkeeper. "We had only enough time to dig a mass grave and cover some of the bodies with mud." Since media isn't allowed anywhere near the war zone, it's impossible to ascertain precise numbers of civilian casualties. But, the men gathered around us nodded in agreement as the shopkeeper spoke.



Pakistani family at the Shah Mansoor tent camp for those displaced by fighting in the Swat Valley. (Photo: Dan Pearson)



Young boy at the Shah Mansoor encampment. (Photo: Dan Pearson)

Exhausted after a three-day walk, they finally reached Shah Mansoor. "They were killing us in that way, there," the shopkeeper said, "and now in this way, here." He motioned toward the tents.

Inside the tents we visited, families have few belongings. They sleep on the ground, with no padding. There was no water for bathing, no functioning latrine, and no electricity. A few days earlier, the government had sent a water truck, but the water was for sale.

The women rarely leave the tents, which become insufferably hot in the afternoon. Listless little children were lying on the ground in one tent. The children come from an area that is much cooler. Their

mother said the children can't adjust to the heat and always feel sick.

Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani announced that displaced people could return home, beginning in mid-July. "Obviously they want to encourage people to go back," responded the UN humanitarian chief, John Holmes, "but we need to be very careful that it is a proper process, that it is voluntary, that the conditions are right when they get there, the basic services as well as security." He also said that the international aid effort will have to continue for many months after people return home. (BBC, July 10, 2009)

Millions of Pakistanis displaced during the military's offensive against the Swat Valley will, according to UN humanitarian envoy Abdul Aziz Arrukban, "die slowly, unless we get more help." (Bronwyn Curran, The National, June 23rd)

Causes of this slow death include increasingly frequent cases of diarrhea, scabies and malaria, all deadly in these circumstances, especially for young children.

Relief groups are concerned that as the monsoon season approaches these problems will worsen. Monsoons bring regional floods that boost rates of malaria and waterborne diseases even in peacetime.

Making the situation much worse is Pakistan's crumbling health care system to which, last year, it budgeted one twenty-third of what it spent on its military.

Under Bush, the US poured \$11.9 billion into Pakistan, 80 percent of which went to the army, which bought \$8 billion worth of weapons. Not a single major public development project was initiated in Pakistan by Washington during the Bush era. Now, 33% of Pakistan's population of 170 million live below the poverty line, and nearly 75% live on less than \$2 a day.

Various Taliban groups have managed to out-administer the Pakistani government by offering vital services it neglects to supply. Some gain recruits by setting up schools where there were none, offering children – only male children - basic education, two meals a day and a change of clothes. The Taliban often exploited Swat residents' strong resentment of

wealthy landowners in the region, promising to implement redistributive land reform.

The U.S. wants Pakistan to use its massive conventional arsenal and army to fight against the Taliban, but by spending its resources on military offensives and more sophisticated weapons, the government risks becoming morally bankrupt and increasingly isolated in the view of people whose needs are neglected.

If Pakistan's government could direct resources toward building civil society by strengthening schools, social services, communication and job prospects, it is reasonable to think that people in poor, remote areas that have been neglected by the government might change their minds about cooperating with newcomers from Taliban groups.

The sign at the entrance to the Shah Mansoor camp, prohibiting weapons, points toward lasting solutions on behalf of those whose basic needs are unmet. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King referred to military spending as "a demonic suction cup," rapidly depleting resources needed to truly build a better world. We hope to find common cause with people in Pakistan and the U.S., seeking an end to militarism and a belief in social security that requires the maxim: No weapons allowed.



We arrive at our destination, the Hussein neighborhood in Amman, Jordan, an area originally designated to house Palestinian refugees. Now, the residents live alongside newly arrived Iraqis who have fled violence in their country.

I get out of the car and look down the alleyway at the crooked row of broken buildings. I see children playing, hear clucking chickens and smell rubber from the tire repair shop on the corner.

I am traveling with workers from Direct Aid Iraq, (DAI), themselves Iraqi refugees, who have generously invited me to learn more about the work

they do. They spend much of their free time assessing the needs of Iraqi families in exile and delivering what help DAI can afford.

We grab our cargo of secondhand clothes and head toward the home of an Iraqi refugee family in need.

Um Hassan greets us at the door. The children peek around her apron strings and break into squeals of laughter when they realize who has come to visit. They have met the DAI team before. The last delivery included a refrigerator and a computer.

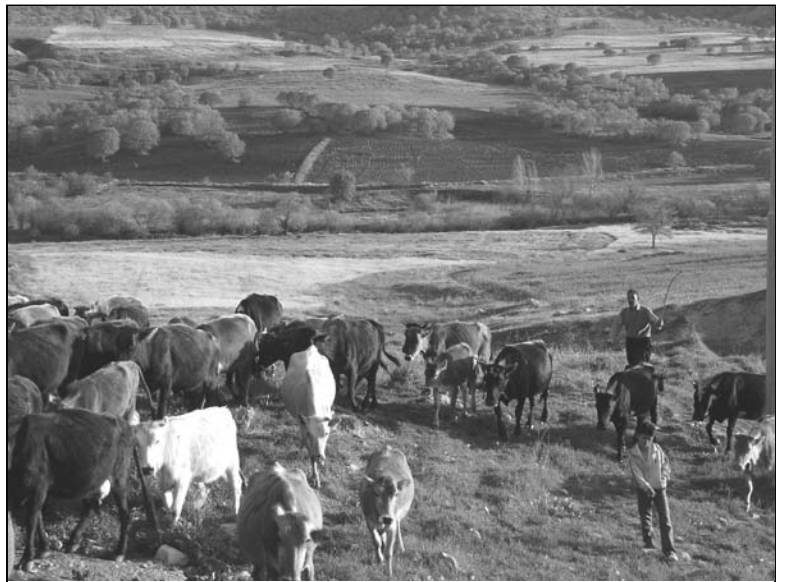
But, it is clear that these relationships are not based on material things. I sense loving and caring feelings between everyone in the room.

Dr. Ghada, DAI's coordinator in Amman, introduces me, explaining that I'm here to better understand the conditions Iraqi refugees experience and to learn how we can advocate on their behalf, in the United States.

We are welcomed in a way that has become predictable for me, and yet never feels routine. I am consistently impressed that Iraqis offer hospitality to me, a stranger, in the same manner they welcome old friends.

First, they invite us to sit down. Then we are given ice water. We talk for a little longer and are asked if we would like some tea, and are given some sweets. A little later, more tea and orange sodas are served.

Hassan, age 13, smiles at me. His eyes shine with an intelligent and inquisitive light. The cold fluorescent tube shows the soft down of his first beard. Hassan was born with myelomeningocele, commonly called spina bifida, a spinal deformity in which a portion of the spine is badly kinked. He hides one of his symptoms, hydrocephalus, by wearing a baseball cap. He can't hide another congenital birth defect that binds him to a wheel chair. If he doesn't receive surgery to straighten his spine, doctors warn that as he matures his symptoms will develop further, leading to his imminent death.



In May, Gerald Paoli from our Chicago office worked in the predominantly Kurdish area of northern Iraq. This is a photo of Kurdish farmers.

(Photo: Christian Peacemaker Teams, www.cpt.org)



Solitary confinement cell in Saddam Hussein's "Red House Prison" Sulaymaniyah, Iraq.

(Photo: Gerald Paoli)

Abu Hassan, the boy's father, is a tall man with dark skin and light brown eyes. He shakes my hand, his large hand dwarfing mine.

I ask Abu Hassan if he can tell me more about the events that led up to his family leaving Iraq. Dr. Ghada offers to translate.

"I was a plumber by trade," he said, "but I took my family to live on a farm outside of Fallujah after the U.S. invasion." He had heard that it was relatively safer in the countryside than in the city. After resettling in an area where there was less shelling, he began to grow feed grain for animals.

In 2004, when a squad of U.S. forces approached the farm, someone fired shots at the troops. Abu Hassan told me he didn't even own a gun. But, the U.S. Forces collected all of the men in the vicinity and took them to Abu Ghraib prison, where they were tortured and interrogated. Abu Hassan's interrogators told him that they didn't think he was the sniper, but they continued to torture and interrogate him about the sniper's identity. He had nothing to tell them. After a year and a half he was released. He was never charged with committing a crime.

I have read about the use of collective punishment and torture by U.S. forces in Iraq. This is my first time hearing a personal account and seeing the toll it takes on a man.

I ask him about his hopes and fears for the future, especially regarding the imminent withdrawal of U.S. troops. He says that he has no hope, that he fears that Iraqis will continue to be treated like lab rats in a fiendish experiment by the U.S. government, an experiment they call Democracy. But it isn't democracy. He fears that the result of this experiment will be to reinforce the divide between ethnic and religious groups the U.S. exploited to splinter Iraq in the first place. He thinks that the rule of law in Iraq may be gone forever. "Not ever," he said, "will I feel safe in my own country."

Abu Hassan feels degraded because he isn't able to support his family. He can only apply for the most difficult jobs with the lowest pay. If Jordanian authorities caught him working illegally, he could be deported.

I ask if he has any hopes for resettling somewhere other than Jordan. "Once there is a record that you have been held for questioning by the U.S. military," he says, smiling sadly, "there are no hopes to be resettled anywhere. I am 41 years old, and I have no hopes."

Tears well up in Abu Hassan's eyes. Ahmed, one of the DAI workers, sees this and promptly scolds him. "While you are still alive, you still have hope."

Before the U.S. aggression, Abu Hassan knew adversity. He struggled with the challenge of caring for his handicapped son but continued to look toward a future for his family.

In 2004, in a rural area of Iraq, an unknown assailant fired shots at U.S. troops. U.S. soldiers reacted by rounding up every male in the region and subjecting all of them to torture in a notorious prison. Now, five years later, Abu Hassan's wrongful imprisonment and the hideous abuse he suffered continue to affect him and his family.

That one incident has irrevocably altered Abu Hassan's state of mind, his ability to provide for his family, and possibly his ability to ever achieve healing for himself and his family.

Holding hope for the future is an everyday struggle for him.

But, he is not alone in this endeavor.

DAI helps build relationships between Iraqis, like Abu Hassan, who are victims of U.S. aggression, and advocates who can offer varying types of support. Together they search for solutions to ease suffering.

For more information about DAI, please visit www.directaidiraq.org



A UNHCR camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) located in northern Iraq and visited by Gerald. It is similar in layout to the camp visited by Kathy & Dan in Pakistan. (Photo: Gerald Paoli)

ANNOUNCING THE PEACEABLE ASSEMBLY CAMPAIGN

Voices for Creative Nonviolence, (www.vcnv.org), is initiating a nationwide Peaceable Assembly Campaign which seeks an end to the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and an end to U.S. support of the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories. Beginning in September, 2009, and continuing for the next ten months, we will engage in both legal and extralegal (nonviolent civil disobedience/civil resistance) lobbying efforts, urging Representatives and Senators to stop authorizing and funding wars and occupations.

The Folly of the Present Policy

At the zenith of its growth in the last half century, the United States of America has the most powerful military forces in all of human history. But this has come at a terrific cost: extravagant demands for resources, trillions of dollars of national debt and the incalculable destruction, displacement, and death that is caused by war.

Projecting military power around the world is extremely costly for all of us.

1) We believe that U.S. policies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan aim, in part, to secure and control priority access to natural resources and to establish ongoing U.S. military presence in these regions.

2) We think it is folly to believe that the United States can successfully control the politics of Iraq, Afghanistan or Pakistan. Ultimately, this project cannot succeed, and is not worth the cost in human lives and national wealth, even if it could succeed.

3) The U.S. and its allies have used armed occupation and military offensives to secure perceived U.S. national interests in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. We believe military solutions are facilitating recruitment for Al Qaeda, Taliban groups, and other organizations that engage in armed resistance to the U.S. and its allies. Lacking the resources to resist overwhelming U.S. superiority in weapons technology, by so-called "conventional warfare," they resort to a variety of improvised tactics,

including terror attacks on civilians. Western attempts to dominate this region are increasing armed resisters, not defeating them.

4) In 2007, the U.S. and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding that the U.S. would provide Israel with \$30 billion in military aid over the next 10 years. The U.S. also signed military pacts worth 13 billion dollars for Egypt and arranged billions of dollars in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Gulf states. U.S. military aid and U.S. weapon sales to the region escalate the arms race and lessen the likelihood that conflicts will be resolved through negotiation and diplomacy.

The current "War on Terror/ Overseas Contingency Operations" paradigm of occupation and militarization is counterproductive. We should not pursue this failed strategy. History clearly points out that attempts at subjugating countries in the Middle East and Central Asia have all failed miserably. We need a new path and vision for creating peace and justice.

Our Proposal

We call on Congress and the Obama Administration to:

1) Demand and organize prompt regional negotiations with all interested parties and seek settlements to these conflicts that could minimize the potential for civil wars during inevitable struggles over political power.

2) Announce and carry out a prompt end to U.S. combat engagement in these wars, and an orderly, prompt withdrawal of all U.S. forces and bases from these countries.

3) Close Guantanamo, Bagram and other detention facilities established as part of the so-called "war on terror" under President Bush and press for full U.S. compliance with all international treaties regarding the treatment of prisoners.

4) Stop all forms of collective punishment imposed on civilians.

5) End U.S. interference in the affairs of other countries.

6) Massively reduce U.S. military spending consistent with these goals.

7) Convert excessive military spending to:

a) Provide assistance to refugees of these conflicts through local aid agencies and the United Nations implementing partners;

b) Support the development of public infrastructure, education, local economies, and healthcare networks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Palestine;

c) Retrofit U.S. housing, transportation, industry and other property assets for maximum energy efficiency;

d) Invent and develop renewable and sustainable methods of alternative energy production;

e) Build energy efficient systems for mass transit throughout the United States;

f) Repair and restore our public infrastructure, including subsidies to create full employment and affordable housing in impoverished and neglected areas;

g) Provide universal health care and quality education for all people living in the United States.

We hold President Obama, elected members of Congress, and ourselves fully accountable for:

i -- all destructive effects of military policies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and

ii -- all failures in domestic policy caused by wasting public resources on war

**THE P.A.C.
TIMELINE OF ACTION**

Voices for Creative Nonviolence is initiating a nationwide Peaceable Assembly Campaign which seeks an end to the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and an end to U.S. support of the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The national Peaceable Assembly Campaign further develops work initiated by close Voices friends and allies, (especially Nashville Greenlands in Tennessee), to whom this project is tied.

PHASES OF THE CAMPAIGN:

September 1 through January 10:

Emphasis will be placed upon the development of local Peaceable Assembly Campaigns. Local campaigns will be encouraged to establish contact with the key staff person in each Representative's and each Senator's office in their area. VCNV will develop and disseminate resources to assist in lobbying efforts regarding objectives of the campaign.

This phase includes organizing for and participating in the national days of action to end the Afghanistan and Iraq wars that will take place in the first two weeks of October (please see the calendar in this newsletter for further information)

**January 11th through January 19th:
Witness Against Torture**

The Peaceable Assembly Campaign encourages participation in Witness Against Torture actions, pressing President Obama and Congress to close Guantanamo, Bagram and other detention facilities established as part of the so-called "war on terror" under President Bush and pressing for full U.S. compliance with all international treaties regarding the treatment of prisoners.

January 19th through February 2nd:
Days of Nonviolent Resistance at the White House

We invite and encourage you to join us in Washington, D.C. for two weeks of daily nonviolent civil disobedience / civil resistance at the White House to press for the complete end to the U.S. wars and military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. We will also press for an end to U.S. support for Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

**February through July 2010:
Legal and Extra-Legal Lobbying**

Two years ago, local organizations around the U.S. participated in the Occupation Project (initiated by Voices and Nashville Greenlands), a campaign that included both legal and extra-legal lobbying efforts. Over 400 arrests occurred in the offices of over 40 Representatives and Senators who refused to publicly commit to voting against additional funding for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. We seek to draw upon the lessons of this 2007 experience and will work with local Peaceable Assembly Campaigns to develop a national campaign of nonviolent civil resistance / civil disobedience which also incorporates legal lobbying efforts to bring about an end to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

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SAVE THE DATES

October 5
Civil Resistance to End the Wars in
Afghanistan and Iraq
The White House
Initiated by the National Campaign for
Nonviolent Resistance, www.iraqpledge.org
info@vcnv.org or 773-878-3815

January 11
Remembering and Resisting 8 Years of
Guantanamo
Initiated by Witness Against Torture
www.witnesstorture.org

January 19 to February 2
Days of Civil Resistance at the White House
to End the Afghanistan and Pakistan Wars
Contact Voices for more information

VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE
AUGUST 2009

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